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THE PROGRESS OF CHURCH UNITY

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Each year sees further development of the principle of co-operation among church workers. We have already published in the BIBLICAL WORLD accounts of various co-operative movements, and we plan to continue to present to our readers additional information in regard to this most interesting matter. In the same proportion as we come to see that Christianity involves life as well as truth and that its end is the production of personal character, shall we see that for such ends churches do not need to be divided along lines of doctrinal formulas. There is no doctrinal cleavage in social service. To bring in the kingdom of God is something vastly greater than to bring in the triumph of a denomination. No denomination has any legitimate claim to existence except as it conserves and develops efficiency in world-saving. How much clearer we see this today than we did five years ago! Some of the movements looking toward this new efficiency of a united evangelicalism Professor Show describes in this article.

Many big questions confront the Christian church today, questions affecting its inner life or growing out of its relations with the complex modern world. All are momentous and press for solution. But the biggest question of all, because the most fundamental, is the business of eliminating the waste of useless competition within the church itself. A hundred and fifty sects in the United States, most of them Christian in name, are rather too many. Denominational groupings are not an unmixed evil by any means. Wholesome competition promotes activity and charity. Church monopolies are not less grasping and unscrupulous than other combinations in restraint of trade. It was Thomas Jefferson who said a diversity of sects gives a sure guaranty against the domination of a powerful state church. Our Christian diversities are good so long as they remain diversities in unity. In the words of Chief Justice

Brewer: "Denominations exist, will exist, and ought to exist. Their existence is in no manner inconsistent with the spirit of unity which should animate all" (Sanford, *Church Fed.*, p. 547).

Historically, however, sectarianism has not promoted the spirit of unity. And so there has arisen in the last generations, in all parts of Christendom, an insistent demand for the better way, a deeper searching of hearts and consciences, a larger look at the opportunity of the church in the modern world. Within the lives of men and women here today, there has come to prevail in the church a richer comprehension of the message of the gospel and a more resolute purpose to put the gospel into life. It is this awakening, as it bears on the problem of Christian unity, of which I am to speak to you here.

Three lines of approach may be discerned to the solution of the problem of a divided Christendom in the last

hundred years: (1) the movement toward organic church unity; (2) the work of undenominational Christian organizations; (3) the growth of interdenominational comity and co-operation. By your leave, I shall trace the progress of these three phases one by one.

1. The Movement toward Organic Church Unity

My topic is set down as "The Progress of Church Unity." It might better be the progress of Christian unity. There is a difference. Christian unity has made splendid progress in our days; church unity has not gotten ahead so well.

a) If we think of the *church universal*, only one item of history in recent times concerns us here. In 1896 a papal encyclical offered the palm branch to the other Christian communions on the basis of recognizing the papal supremacy. The invitation was promptly declined by the Greek patriarch and the Anglican bishops for their respective churches, and the incident was closed. In that direction one sees absolutely no sign of readjustment or reunion.

b) In the same time much more extended efforts have been made to bring about the reunion of the Protestant Episcopal church, English and American, with the dissenting bodies which have sprung from it since the Reformation.

In 1886 the "Chicago-Lambeth Proposals" made overtures for reunion on the basis of the so-called "Quadri-lateral" or fourfold confession: the authority of Scripture, the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed, the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper,

and the historic episcopate. There has been much conferring and informal negotiation, but nothing practical has come of it. The Lambeth conferences of 1897 and 1908 reaffirmed the proposals, but without material change. In 1910 a group of Episcopal clergy and laity in and about New York City organized an unofficial body called the "Christian Unity Foundation" to work for organic unity, in which endeavor they have shown some zeal without any wide departure from the Lambeth position. Since 1910 also both branches of the Anglican church have given their support to the promotion of a "World's Conference on Faith and Order" designed to advance the cause of Christian unity.

To all these overtures the dissenting bodies have made appreciative response; but naturally they do not find in the historic episcopate, in the Anglican sense, any secure footing for Christian union. Of special interest to all Congregationalists is the endeavor of a group of New England pastors, led by Newman Smyth, to find common ground with their Episcopal brethren; and the appointment by the National Council, in 1910, of a special committee to work for closer fellowship with the Episcopal church. But so far as I know, nothing definite has yet come from these efforts. Various things indicate a very conservative attitude in the Episcopal church. It has not given its official sanction to the Federal Council, altogether the most potent agency for union yet in the field. It has refused every suggestion from within or from without to modify its position in the matter of the historic episcopate.

c) In another direction the outlook

for organic union is more hopeful. A positive centripetal tendency is drawing together the churches of kindred traditions. Denominations with like forms of polity and of creed are beginning to coalesce into larger units, the congregational bodies in a group, the presbyterian bodies in another, and so on. And in not a few instances the instinct for union has overcome differences of polity, and larger combinations have been made.

This movement has by no means been confined to our country. In Germany the Lutheran and Reformed churches have drawn closer together. In Scotland the final union of the Free Church and the United Presbyterian church was celebrated in 1900. In Australia and New Zealand the basis of permanent union has been laid. In Canada the long negotiations of Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Methodists resulted, a few years ago, in the founding of the United Church of Canada, not as a confederation but as an actual consolidation of the three bodies. Perhaps the finest examples of organic union come from the mission field where indeed this whole impulse toward closer fellowship had its birth. At the World's Missionary Conference in London, 1910, plans of union, more or less fully realized, were reported from China, Japan, and India, the most striking case being the affiliation of Congregationalists, Dutch Reformed, and Presbyterians in the South India United Church. Clearly the process of organic union will go yet farther in the mission fields; for nowhere else is so flagrantly revealed the un-Christian waste of useless duplication and petty rivalry. The reports of Dr. Mott's

recent visit to China show how steadily this spirit of union is growing in that great land.

In our own country notable progress has been made toward unification. The Cumberland Presbyterians have returned to the parent fold, and other Presbyterians seem likely to follow. The same home-seeking spirit has shown itself in the several branches of the Methodist order. Finally, for about ten years Congregationalists have been laboring to accomplish union with the Methodist Protestant and United Brethren churches. While these negotiations are at present in suspense, there is yet ground for hope at least for union between the Methodist Protestants and the United Brethren. The Free Baptists are joining the Northern Baptist Convention, having turned over their missions, mission funds, etc., to the larger societies, and are represented on the Convention committees.

All in all, the prospect is satisfactory for the consolidation of the denominations into kindred groups of churches. The old causes of division have disappeared. A nobler apprehension of the truth has come in. The petty sectarianism of a few generations ago is no longer in good repute. With one accord the churches are looking more at their common inheritance and less at their differences, and it augurs well for the future.

Beyond a limited degree, however, the new fellowship will not express itself in organic union. Twenty years ago many earnest souls were working and praying for constitutional unity in the church; no other way seemed adequate and Christian. But they and

their kind are no longer looking in that direction. With the apostle Paul they are able to say: "and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way." There is a more excellent way than the absorption of all the churches into one big, dominating church.

2. The Work of Undenominational Christian Organizations

A group of splendid associations and societies which have sought to be Christian without being sectarian have pointed out this more excellent way, setting up thus a new standard of fellowship in the modern church.

a) As the pioneer in the field, first honors are due to the American Bible Society. Organized in 1816, it lacks but three years of a rounded century of service. In its time it has printed and distributed nearly a hundred million copies of the Scriptures, carrying untold blessings into many lands. And from the beginning the Bible Society has been wholly undenominational.

In rapid succession other great undenominational agencies followed its example: in 1824 the American Sunday School Union, preceded by the British Sunday School Union in 1803; in 1825 the American Tract Society; in 1832 the International Sunday School Association, till 1906 called the International Sunday School Convention; in 1851 the Young Men's Christian Association, to be followed soon by the sister organization for women, both of them long since encompassing the globe by their wonderful work.

All these co-operative groups of Christian people came before the Civil War which brought a crisis in religious work as

in all other spheres of national life. When the crisis was past and normal conditions returned, there came another great religious awakening, broader and of larger moment than before. The earlier associations went on with their labors, but to them were added many more. In 1873 the Evangelical Alliance took definite form and began its significant career. While the alliance has not accomplished all that was hoped for, it has been worthy of its ideals, and it has helped to prepare the way for better things. In 1874 the Woman's Christian Temperance Union began its fight against the saloon; the same year was held the first Chautauqua Assembly; in 1881 came the Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor with its impelling appeal to the youth of the churches; about the same time began the Student Volunteer movement which has sent so many young men and women into mission fields; in 1895 came the World's Student Christian Federation, uniting the Christian students of all lands in co-operative service; in 1903 the Religious Education Association attacked its problem in our modern life; and so on. Passing by many such worthy endeavors to correlate the working forces of our Christian churches, I must name one other organization. Dr. Graham Taylor has recently said (*Survey*, XXIX, 368) that until lately the most truly ecumenical body in our American life was the National Conference of Charities and Corrections. That remark will carry weight with those who know the solid and useful work of this society. While built on purely humanitarian lines, it has exemplified the spirit of the gospel in the finest way.

These are but glimpses of undenominational Christian activities in the century past. These organizations have done a great work, and they have shamed our churches out of their narrowness and bigotry. More than any other force save the free spirit of Christ, they have pointed the way to the ideals of Christian union. First must come the spirit of fellowship, a genuine, unreluctant Christian feeling among the churches. Then there can be talk of union. These great national bodies have brought the spirit, and they can see the fruits of their labors; they have shown the more excellent way.

3. The Growth of International Comity and Co-operation

There remains the matter of interdenominational comity and co-operation. No one who reads the signs of the times can doubt that the present movement in the churches means something great and good. To appraise the situation fairly, I must speak of interdenominational activity in three phases: (*a*) local and state organizations; (*b*) national organizations; (*c*) International organizations and world-movements.

But I must allow myself to turn aside long enough to say that the earliest attempts to establish interdenominational comity in America are associated with our own denominational history. In 1801, under the inspiration of the great religious awakening at the end of the eighteenth century, and in the face of a common peril, the general Association of Connecticut and the General Assembly of the Presbyterian church formed what is known as the "Plan of Union," an agreement designed to secure

co-operation in home missionary fields—the first object-lesson of any note in American church history, in the matter of Christian comity. Following up this impulse, in 1810 the American Board was constituted on an interdenominational basis, including the Old School Presbyterians to 1837, the Dutch Reformed to 1857, the New School Presbyterians to 1870, and the German Reformed to 1879; in 1826 the American Home Missionary Society began its work, co-operating with the Presbyterians under the Plan of Union until 1861 when the latter body withdrew. These initial efforts to realize ideals of comity and fellowship are thus highly suggestive as pointing the way to the future.

a) Among the recent endeavors to reach co-operation through local and state organizations, first place belongs to the Interdenominational Comity Commission of Maine. This association was formed in 1880. It includes the five leading denominations of the state: Baptists, Free Baptists, Congregationalists, Methodist Episcopalians, and Christians. It endeavors to eliminate harmful competition and thus to insure better service. An executive committee of five, one for each denomination, practically controls the situation, determining where new churches shall be planted and which denomination shall have charge, where superfluous churches are to be removed or combined with others, and so on. The "Maine experiment," as it was once called, long since ceased to be an experiment. It has been a conspicuous success and has exerted a beneficent influence on the country at large. In many states interdenomina-

tional comity is an accomplished fact; in not a few there are definite state federations of churches working for common ends. Of special note are the New York State Federation of Religion, organized in 1899 and combining in its membership both Jews and Christians, orthodox and unorthodox, for the work of social reform; and the Federation of Churches and Christian Workers of New York State, organized in 1900 among nine leading denominations for mutual aid in Christian service.

The city churches have produced another type of federated effort. Such organizations are too numerous for individual consideration here. A good example of city federation may be seen in Cleveland where Jews, Roman Catholics, and Protestants have worked together for social betterment; and a yet better illustration in the Federation of Churches and Christian Workers of New York City, organized in 1895 and very active ever since. This federation, which grew out of several earlier bodies, seeks to co-ordinate the working forces of the churches in the great metropolis, striving to realize Washington Gladden's ideal of a "municipal church" (*Century*, LXXX, 493-99; *Current Literature*, XLIX, 413-14). It has the support of Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists, Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Lutherans, and in some degree of Roman Catholics—a very praiseworthy degree of Christian fellowship. While more an organization of churches and individuals than of denominations, the New York City Federation is serving also to bring the denominations together in the most effective way. The Co-operative Council of City Missions in Chicago for

several years maintained a remarkable unity among the five denominations represented in its membership.

Thus in the field of local co-operation in community and in state, things are moving ahead, a very hopeful augury indeed, since the serious side of the question is this matter of local adjustment.

b) On the larger stage of *national life* also there are many signs of promise. Time does not suffice for me to dwell upon the federations already made or in the making in Japan, in Korea, in the Philippines, in China, and in India. These all are children of the missionary fellowship already spoken of. Most significant from every side among the foreign church alliances is the Free Church Congress of Great Britain, established in 1892 and for more than twenty years a mighty force in the effectiveness of the dissenting churches. Through the agency of the Free Church Congress the non-liturgical churches of Great Britain have more nearly come into their own. The constituent denominations co-operate in evangelical labors, in the prevention of overlapping, and in social reform. Incidentally they have stood firmly against the closer union of church and state in England. We in America have peculiar occasion for gratitude to the British churches which have, in the Free Church Congress, set the pattern for similar endeavors this side the sea.

In our own country the federation of denominations has come about gradually and silently, but it *has* come about, and today the situation is nearly all one could desire. Step by step the spirit of co-operation and the machinery to express it have come into being. In

1899 two interdenominational bodies in New York City, the Open Church League and the New York City Federation, united in calling a conference to form a national organization. This conference created the National Federation of Churches and Christian Workers after the pattern of the like-named societies in New York City and New York state. In 1902 this national federation issued a call for a conference to be held in 1905 to which the denominations as such were asked to send their representatives. The response was splendid. At the Inter-Church Conference for Federation in Carnegie Hall, New York, in November, 1905, thirty-two denominations, representing 18,000, 000 communicants, were present through their delegates and shared in the proceedings. The conference perfected a plan for permanent federation and appointed a meeting for final organization in 1908. In the interim the plan was submitted to the constituent denominations; and when the delegates again convened in Philadelphia, 1908, the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America came into being. In December last the Federal Council held its first quadrennial meeting in Chicago; and so it has demonstrated its purpose to stay.

The Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America is not an alliance of individual churches or of individual persons, but an official compact of denominations. The thirty-one or thirty-two denominations included comprise all the larger divisions of the evangelical American churches except the Episcopalians, who have not chosen to affiliate

except in work on commissions. The Southern Baptists also are as yet not members of the Council. The Unitarians and the Universalists were not invited to come in.

The authority of the Federal Council is vested in an executive committee representing the denominations and in a corps of officers elected every four years. (The permanent secretary is Rev. Charles S. Macfarland, an honored Congregational minister). The Federal Council accomplishes its active work chiefly through special committees on foreign missions, home missions, temperance, education, evangelism, and so on; the most serviceable as yet being the Committee on the Church and Social Service. Through these committees the Federal Council is able to mass its working forces effectively.

From the outset, too, the Federal Council has sought to reach the delicate problem of local church comity through the organization of local and state federations under its general direction. But it is yet too early to pass judgment on this aspect of the system.

All things considered, the Federal Council promises great things for our American Christianity. Here is the concrete realization of diversity in unity, of ample fellowship without loss of identity. It does not indeed completely solve the question of Christian union; but it goes a long way in that direction. The catholicity and uplift of these splendid meetings of 1905, 1908, 1912, their breadth of Christian charity, are unmistakable. A new day has come whereof we have great occasion to be glad.¹

¹An account of the remarkably efficient work of the Home Mission Council is given in the *Biblical World* for June.

c) I promised to speak of *international movements* for comity, but my space allows only the briefest mention. Various alliances, associations, conferences, and confederations on these lines have come forward in the last quarter-century. Some of these are meetings of representatives of a given denomination from different lands, like the Pan-Anglican Synods of 1867 and 1908; the Pan-Presbyterian Alliance of 1876; and the Pan-Methodist Council of 1881, all of them now somewhat in the past. Others are interdenominational as well as international, like the Ecumenical Conference of 1900, the World's Missionary Conference of 1910, and the World's Conference on Faith and Order projected for the near future. Still others are not only international and interdenominational, but also interreligious, comprising in their fellowship men of all faiths who choose to come. Since the Chicago World's Congress of Religions in 1892, American Unitarians have been specially active in promoting such meetings, as witnessed by the Liberal Congress of Religions in 1894 and in subsequent years; the International Council of Unitarians and Other Liberal Religious Thinkers and Workers which since its formation in 1900 has held meetings in London, Amsterdam, Geneva, Boston, and Berlin; and finally the Inter-Religious Congress in Japan, 1911, participated in by Christians, Buddhists, and Shintoists—a meeting which has been called the biggest thing in religious history since the Chicago World's Congress. All these agencies have their place and contribute their help toward the fuller brotherhood of man, the final federation of the world.

Conclusion

In the main I must leave the summing up to care for itself. But a word or two are in order.

There is no prospect of organic unity in the church. The best people in the churches have ceased to desire it, having found what seems the more excellent way. The spirit of fellowship, without which all else is vain, has laid its consecrating spell on our common faith, and has brought a vision which will not fade away. Through divers forms of co-operative effort, the churches have learned how to work together in harmony, love, and mutual respect. They have set themselves resolutely to do the sensible thing, which is also the Christian thing, in all phases of their task. Once and for all, as I believe, they have lifted the common inheritance of faith and service above sectarian demands of whatever sort, and that too will abide.

The practical aspects are not insuperable. *National* supervision of all large general interests—home and foreign missions, charities, social reforms, and so on—under interdenominational boards truly representative in character; *state* supervision of the planting and nurturing of churches, under state boards of interdenominational character; *local* supervision in the individual church through the voice of a majority of its members in conference with state authorities; *denominational* supervision in the particular field allotted to each organic body: this seems to me a practicable program and the one toward which the course of events is carrying us.

Some difficulties remain. Romanists and Anglican Christians stand apart and

are likely to continue to do so. Many also have felt it to be a mistake to exclude from this wider fellowship into which the churches are coming Unitarians, Universalists, and like-minded Christians; while as to the Christian Science church, the Salvation Army, and divers other forms of Christian activity, no answer is forthcoming. There is yet needed the catholicity large enough to comprehend them all.

Nevertheless the impossible has come to pass. This imposing army of Christian believers have forgotten their differences of polity and doctrine and

creed, remembering only their common call to service; and thus they have attained, in a real and vital measure, unto the "more excellent way."

Many in one, our fathers said,
Many in one, say we;
Of differing creeds, of differing forms,
Love brings us unity.

From each, from all, may life outflow,
To each and all flow in
It needs us all to swell the chords
Of life's triumphant hymn.

—*Proc. of Seventh Ann. Meet. of Congr. of Rel.*, Buffalo, N.Y., 1901, pp. 304-5.

ADVERTISING CHRISTIANITY

WILLIAM F. COCHRANE

Baltimore, Md.

In the recent convention of advertising men held in Baltimore the religious advertising campaign, conducted in the *Baltimore News*, has received such indorsement that a word as to the aims of the campaign may be in season.

Speaking from the pulpits of some thirty churches of the city, Christian advertising men touched almost without exception upon the merits of this campaign. Their indorsement will make it far easier to secure support for the continuance of this effort from a wider circle of church leaders. It needed something of this sort, and from this quarter, to convince conservative Christian business men of the sanity of such a course of advertising; and to break down in their minds any feeling of a loss

of dignity to religion through this campaign.

The burden of the messages of these speakers seemed to be more the idea of driving home *truths* through advertising than of simply creating a psychological effect by the repetition of phrases and by constantly bringing before the minds of the reading public the same suggestion regarding the matter to be advertised, whether the suggestion were true or false. We never have felt that merely the psychological suggestion of "going to church" would in itself cause any material increase in church attendance.

Our purpose in advertising has lain deeper than this, and can be summed up in a succinct way under the following heads: